

## **TESTIMONY FOR**

### **Raised Bill No. 261**

#### **AN ACT CONCERNING VETERANS SERVICES AT STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

I'm Giacomo "Jack" Mordente, Coordinator, Veterans and Military Affairs, Southern CT State University (SCSU).

I'd like to thank the committee for this opportunity to provide testimony for Raised Bill No. 261, "AN ACT CONCERNING VETERANS SERVICES AT STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES". I'm not representing Southern. This testimony is my personal response.

I served on active duty in the Army as a Social Worker from 1970-1974 and continued in the Reserves until 1982 when I was discharged as a Captain.

I began my work at SCSU in 1975 when I was hired under the Veterans Cost of Instruction Program (VCIP) Federal Grant that gave colleges and universities funds to establish fulltime Veterans Offices to provide services for our Vietnam Veterans. The amount of money we received was based on our veteran's population. Almost every Community College and four year state schools in the country received the grant. Vietnam Veterans could not afford to go to private schools.

The grant required us to provide GI Bill Certification to the Veterans Administration (VA), counsel, outreach, recruitment, academic advisement and liaison with local, state and national organizations.

In 1980 I established our Veterans Drop-In-Center. It has furniture, a microwave, refrigerator and TV. When computers came a long, we added them to the Center.

The Centers are a place that gives our veterans, active duty military, National Guard, Reserves and dependents (referred to as "Military" for the rest of this testimony) a place to be with each other, network, socialize, tutor, share stories about their military service and bust each other chops about their different branches. Our campus Veterans Association meets here.

2.

I'm proud to say that our Center was used as the model to establish what are now called the "Operation Academic Support for Incoming Service Members (OASIS) centers. I'm a 60's guy so I will always have a Veterans Drop-In-Center! We call it Forward Operating Base (FOB) Southern. This term is used to describe Combat Bases that are the "Tip of the Spear" when engaging with the enemy.

**Requiring schools to hire a full-time professional to staff the OASIS is critical as it will help our Military adjust to college and civilian life.**

In the mid-eighties the VCIP Grant I mentioned above was discontinued because the Vietnam Veterans GI Bill was ending. When schools closed their Veterans Offices Southern hired me as a state employee maintaining their commitment to provide services for our veterans.

**The federal government requires that every school has a Veterans School Certifying Official (VSCO) who certifies our Military to the VA for their GI Bill.** When VCIP ended the schools transferred this responsibility to the Bursar's, Financial Aid or Registrars Offices. Although these staffers are not usually veterans, they are incredibly diligent and committed to making sure our military get their GI Bill in a timely fashion.

**In my opinion the person hired under this Bill should NOT also be designated as the School Certifying Official (SCO) as this will seriously compromise their ability to provide the services that this Bill is requiring. I strongly recommend that you consider using the following language as part of the Bill in Section 1(b).**

**"This Bill requires that the professional's hired under this subsection "NOT" be designated as School Certifying Official's (SCO's) as this would affect their ability to provide the comprehensive OASIS responsibilities".**

The only exceptions to this are at Gateway Community College and Western CT State University. Their Coordinator of Veterans and Military Affairs prefer to continue being the schools SCO as well as the OASIS supervisor. I support their decision.

3.

Those hired under this Bill will be American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). We must all have the same job description. Attached is my AFSCME job description. Please note the Qualifications required.

If the Bill is passed as written it will **require** that our campuses employ one dedicated professional to staff the OASIS Centers. In our case it will be our Board of Regents (BOR) who will be responsible for this. Who will provide oversight to insure the schools comply with the law?

As you may know less than 1% of our population serves in the military. Unless you know someone who has served, our wars are not on most people's radar.

In 2006 I developed the presentation "From the Battlefield to the Classroom" and gave it at the Department of Defense's World-Wide Education Symposium. In 2007 I gave it at the National Association of Student Personal Administrators (NASPA) annual conference. Since then I have given it to faculty, staff and students at colleges and universities and in the classroom. Attached is the outline. It is an honor for me having my program recognized in Section 1 (d).

On 30 March I'm giving the presentation at Eastern CT State University. I would like the committee to strongly consider having the Bill require that I give the presentation at all of our schools. This will help facilitate the new OASIS Coordinators being able to implement some or all of its components for their program and services as they continue to educate their faculty, staff and students.

This concludes my testimony. Are there any questions?

*Giuseppe "Jack" Mordante*  
3 March 2016

## OUTLINE

### FROM THE BATTLEFIELD TO THE CLASSROOM

Jack Mordente

- Understanding our military and the options to serve
- How we turn civilians into soldiers (with video)
- The Realities of War (slides)
- The Brotherhood (with video)
- Women in the military
- Military Sexual Trauma (MST) (with video)
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Suicide
- Sothern's war losses
- The GI Bill
- Veterans transition to college and civilian life
- The strengths and challenges veterans bring to college and civilian life
- What schools can do to be veteran friendly
- Suggestions for faculty and staff
- Establishing fulltime Veterans Offices and Drop-In-Centers (with video)

**SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY**  
New Haven, CT  
**POSITION DESCRIPTION**

**POSITION TITLE:** Coordinator, Veterans and Military Services

**RANK:** Administrator IV

**DEPARTMENT:** Student Affairs

**SUPERVISOR'S TITLE:** Director of New Student and Sophomore Programs

**POSITION SUMMARY:**

Under the supervision of the Director of New Student and Sophomore Programs, the Coordinator of Veterans and Military Services designs and implements programs that serve students who are Military Active Duty, Veterans, National Guard, Reservists, and their dependents. The Coordinator serves as the primary liaison with local, state and federal agencies and as a resource to the University and the public at-large. The Coordinator researches and remains current on issues related to veteran and military affairs support services in postsecondary education settings.

**POSITION RESPONSIBILITIES:**

Directs the activities of the Office of Veterans and Military Services and various VA compliance programs of the university.

Selects, trains, supervises and evaluates student staff, manages the operating budget, and conducts annual program and service evaluations of the Office of Veterans and Military Services.

Provides academic and vocational assistance to veteran and military students, making appropriate referrals to Counseling Services, Academic Advising, Career Services, Women's Center, Office of Diversity and Equity and other student support services, as necessary.

Works closely with and makes referrals to the Veterans Administration, including the Veterans Health Administration, (VHA) Veterans Benefits Administration, (VBA) and Vet Center, and other local and state agencies.

Advises veteran and military students on their eligibility for VA educational benefits, including CT War Veterans Tuition Waiver and National Guard Tuition Waiver Programs, and refers eligible students to the Bursar's Office for processing.

Establishes and maintains collegial and programmatic relationships with academic and administrative departments and engages in collaborative programing initiatives with related student service functions.

Provides training and serves as a resource to all campus constituencies (individual faculty, academic departments and administrative units) on all aspects of the program, including but not limited to sensitivity to veterans issues and emerging trends in veteran's and military rights and services.

**Coordinator of Veterans and Military Services**  
**Administrator IV Pg. 2**

In cooperation with the Admissions Office, coordinates outreach, recruitment and pre-enrollment consultations with prospective new students on a local, state, and national level.

Acts as champion and advocate for veterans rights within the context of university obligations, both within the university community and beyond (community agencies, other postsecondary institutions, professional associations and prospective students).

Serves on committees and represents the Office of Veteran and Military Services in meetings, seminars and workshops, both on and off campus, in consultation with the Director of New Student and Sophomore Programs.

Serves as advisor to the Student Veterans Association, promoting university-wide understanding of veterans and military issues.


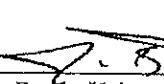
Performs other duties and responsibilities related to those enumerated above which do not alter the basic level of responsibilities of the position.

**QUALIFICATIONS:**

Bachelor's degree in a related field required. Four years of administrative experience with demonstrated ability to relate to students, faculty and staff. A Master's Degree in related field is preferred. Proven ability and experience working with veterans and military students, delivering services to them and proven ability to coordinate multi-faceted programs with student support services required. These qualifications may be waived for individuals with appropriate alternate experience.

**FLSA: Exempt**

Revised and change in title March 2014

 10/29/14  - 29 Oct 14  
For the University Date For the Union Date